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Hunt Looks Brighter

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E. Howard Hunt, the Watergate plumber, former CIA agent, and author of more than 50 potboiler novels dealing with international intrigue, cannot, it appears, even write his memoirs without becoming entwined in subterfuge.

Hunt's book, "Under-Cover," which was published Monday by G. P. Putnam's Sons, contains an exciting narrative of the life and strange times of the man who became America's most famous spy. But it also includes a few lies and assorted inaccuracies designed to protect Hunt against his various past perjuries.

Or at least Hunt said it did when he gave what he billed as the real truth in his testimony before the Watergate coverup trial in Washington two weeks ago.

"I didn't write under oath" explained Hunt, who is free from jail pending the outcome of an appeal, and who was in Philadelphia yesterday as part of a national tour to promote the book. He discussed the inaccuracies, which he said were minor changes of dates and times, during a long interview in his room at the Barclay Hotel.

"My contract stipulated that I write nothing libelous or unlawful. And I fulfilled my contract. I was naive enough to think that I wouldn't be called to testify at the coverup trial."

"Sophisticated readers realize that one takes a certain amount of latitude in doing one's memoirs. In my case it involves 100 words out of more than 165,000 words."

The alleged (or admitted, as the case may be) errors do involve mainly small points. The more major problems with the book are the

omissions from the book of information and material that appear to implicate former Attorney General John Mitchell as the authorizer of the Watergate escapades.

Also Hunt alludes to, but omits specific mention of the memorandum he sent to the White House after he was jailed spelling out the payments and other emoluments he felt had best be forthcoming.

In any event, the big news from Howard Hunt appeared to be that things are looking up these days for a man who not too long ago was claiming to have been "ruined" by Watergate.

The sallow complexion produced by months of imprisonment is tanned now, as a result of his recent move to Florida. And Hunt, who was described as a gaunt, wispy man when he testified before the Senate Watergate Committee, now almost qualifies as rotund.

Hunt, the spy left out in the cold whose demands for money spelled the beginning of the Nixon coverup, says he has even grown accustomed to controversy and notoriety, after years of clandestine activities. (Even most of his books were published under pseudonyms.)

Drinking a tall glass of Scotch and water, Hunt says, "I've been accused of almost everything except the kidnapping of the Lindbergh baby, which took place when I was 9 years old."

"The most outrageous charges boil down to two areas — Martha Mitchell has promulgated the idea that I had something to do with Arthur Bremer and the attempted assassination of Governor Wallace. And the National Tattler printed an article last March accusing me of involvement in the Kennedy assassination."

Hunt has filed a libel suit against the Tattler, and may take legal action to try to block the publication of "The Watergate Women," a book alleging that the death of Hunt's wife in a plane crash was murder.

Hunt finds the charges maddening. His wife's death in December 1972 "was the most devastating loss" of the Watergate ordeal, he says. She had made the flight only because Hunt was confined to the Washington Metropolitan area by a court order. "The plane crash, for many weeks, removed my will to live," he says.

He also fears that the charges regarding the assassinations could trigger a Jack Ruby-type nut to come after him. "As a convicted felon, I cannot carry any firearms, so I would be defenseless," Hunt notes. If he wins his appeal, he says he plans to move to Spain or Mexico.

Being a Watergate celebrity appears to have done wonders for Hunt's literary career. All of his earlier works have been republished under his own name. He reportedly received a \$100,000 advance for his memoirs, and already has plans for a new book about his prison experiences, "touching on the humorous as well as the grim side of it."

Hunt, however, claims he is barely breaking even. "I want to lay to rest this notion that I am profiting from my notoriety. The envelope with book royalties may be addressed to me; but the recipient is my attorneys. My expenses are more than \$7,000 a month," he says.

Hunt does not regard his demands for funds from the White House, coupled with threats to reveal "seamy things," as blackmail. "I was a bill collector, doing

have done when someone purchases a product and doesn't pay for it."

Some additional aspects of his involvement in Watergate have hurt him deeply. "Every experience leaves grooves in the brain, and my imprisonment was certainly the most catastrophic experience of my life."

Many friends have abandoned him. "My Christmas card list is just about nonexistent this year," he says. Only a few friends, including William F. Buckley Jr., have stood by him.

Hunt was also affected by the passages in the Nixon tapes in which the President ridiculed him, but added, "He knows too damn much."

"I was terribly disillusioned," Hunt says. "I read them with a sense of betrayal and sorrow."